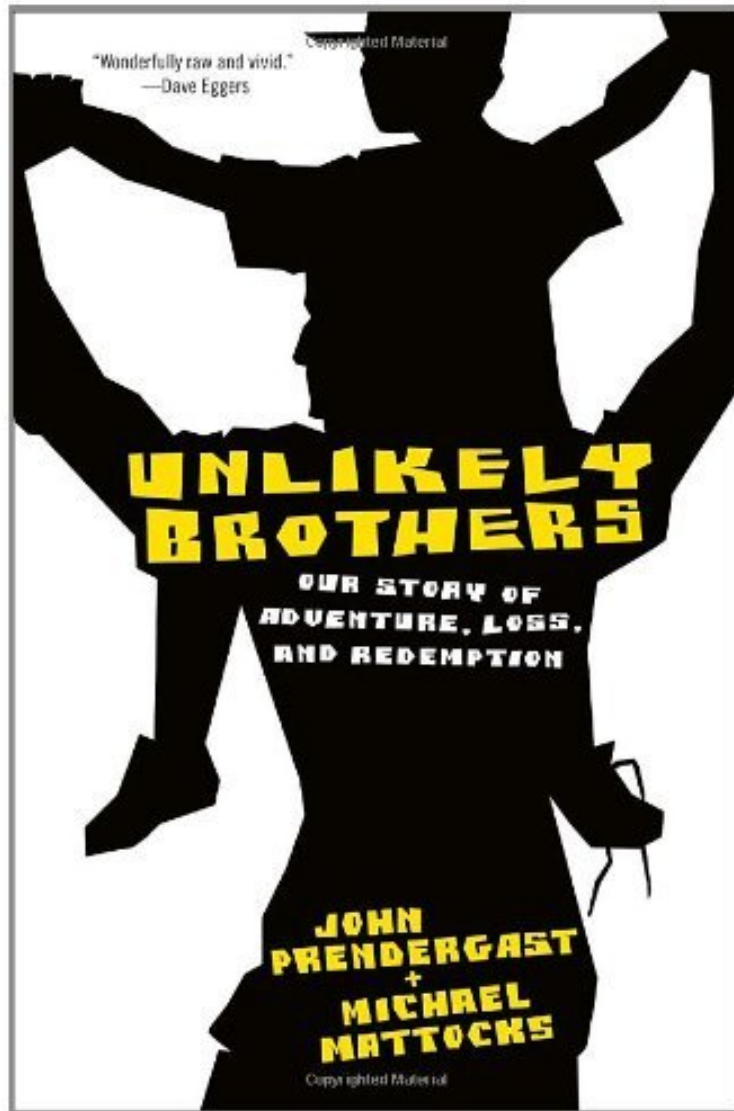


[Library ebook] Unlikely Brothers: Our Story of Adventure, Loss, and Redemption

Unlikely Brothers: Our Story of Adventure, Loss, and Redemption

John Prendergast, Michael Mattocks

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John Prendergast, Michael Mattocks : Unlikely Brothers: Our Story of Adventure, Loss, and Redemption before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unlikely Brothers: Our Story of Adventure, Loss, and Redemption:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A GREAT BOOK ABOUT TWO VERY DIFFERENT FRIENDS AND "BROTHERS" By Michael C. This autobiography of two very unlikely brothers, as the title proclaims, is a very well written and informative book which can give the reader an understanding of the very different situations and choices available to people (one a young child and the other a young adult) who meet in a mentoring relationship, which, in one way or another, lasted for close to 30 years. The structure of the book gives the reader a close look at

these differences since each writes from his perspective alternatively as they grow older and have such different experiences that they can't understand or communicate with each other during most years of this "mentorship," and their lives go on with their mostly growing farther apart. Michael Mattocks, the charming and bright seven year old black child who is living in a homeless shelter is mentored by John at the suggestion of a friend. Michael's greatest wish is to help his barely surviving family, and John's greatest wish is to help the people in Darfur and elsewhere in Africa to fight against genocide and other kinds of oppression. John (J.P. in the book) becomes very well educated and influential in his field of endeavor and Michael becomes a drug dealer when he is about eleven years old and he is then able to help his mother and siblings and other relatives, many of whom are living with them. Except for JP and his family and the family of the woman who later becomes his wife, Michael doesn't see any other role models in his immediate environment of one of the worst housing projects in the country, who aren't either using drugs or selling drugs or engaging in other destructive behavior. The story of how Michael manages to overcome the limitations of his environment is most moving. I had already known of John Prendergast and his accomplishments and I only discovered his mentorship of Michael by accident since this wonderful book hasn't been well publicized. Michael's sections of the book are brief, but eye-opening. While John did much great work, his sections of the book are a bit long-winded, especially when he discusses his problems with his father - who Michael absolutely adored. Class and racial differences are very clearly illustrated in this book, and readers are invited to ask each of these authors to make arrangements for them to speak at the end of the book. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Brutally Honest By Claudette Moore I purchased the book after seeing the authors on C-SPAN Book TV online. I was interested in the story because I grew up in northeast Washington, DC and I was familiar with the locations mentioned by Michael and JP. I also wanted to learn what Michael thought about being a homeless child. It turns out children have this great ability to find adventure in whatever environments they find themselves in. This is a great story and I highly recommend the book. JP's experience in the social justice arena was enlightening and some of the situations were scary. The book started out slow but picked up very quickly and became a page turner. This book reveals the capacity of human beings to grow and change into healthy responsible individuals. The book also reveals the PTSD issues experienced by young people who witness gun violence and how young people become numb to that violence. Thanks Michael and JP for telling your stories. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good Read By Nathalie Parchment Read for Book Club, hard to read after having read *Something Borrowed* by Emily Giffin which was a light woman without self esteem and romance. Unlikely brothers dealt with poverty, interaction of nonfamily members considering each other family and their success. Reflecting on it now It was a good read.

"You don't look like brothers . . ." Peace activist and cofounder of the Enough Project, John Prendergast is known as a champion of human rights in Africa. But the not-so-public face of J.P. is the life he led as a Big Brother to Michael Mattocks. As a curious, driven, and emotionally wounded twenty-year-old, J.P. made the life-changing decision to form a "Big Brother/Little Brother" relationship with then seven-year-old Michael, who was living out of plastic bags and drifting from one homeless shelter to the next with his mother and siblings. Lacking a connection with his own brother and distancing himself from a disastrous relationship with his father, J.P. formed a unique bond with Michael the moment they met. Michael and J.P. became like family, with Michael and some of his siblings even living with J.P. one summer. In the years that followed, J.P. took Michael and his brothers on outings, whether it was fishing, playing basketball, patronizing cheap restaurants, or going on road trips. This friendship would continue for over twenty-five years as the two coped with varying degrees of violence, instability, and trauma in their own lives. Told in duet, *Unlikely Brothers* follows Michael as he grows up on the tough streets of Washington, D.C., where as a young teenager he watched his best friend get shot, dropped out of school, and started dealing crack cocaine shortly thereafter. By sixteen, Michael had become the kingpin of his neighborhood, guns and drugs always close at hand. Meanwhile, J.P. was traveling to and from African war zones. J.P. offered Michael a refuge from the streets, never really confronting the gravity of what Michael was going through in his adolescence. In turn, Michael afforded J.P. an escape from his own turbulent personal and professional life. As the years go by, the two swoop in and out of each other's lives, slowly disconnecting as they disappear into their respective worlds, but making their way back to each other at a critical moment for both of them. The effect the two have on each other is extremely significant to both of their paths to redemption. Inspirational and deeply moving, *Unlikely Brothers* beautifully showcases how life's most random moments can often be the most profound. From the Hardcover edition.

"A book like *Unlikely Brothers* could have been a slog. It could have been gauzy and preachy. But what John and Michael have pulled off is something as unlikely as their brotherhood—a memoir wonderfully raw and vivid that manages to tell us something new about poverty and struggle and humility and hope. You'll read this in one sitting."—Dave Eggers, author of *Zeitoun* and *What Is the What* "Read this book, and learn more about our common humanity like I did. This inspiring story will touch your heart and have you believing we are our brother's keeper all over again."—Wes Moore, New York Times bestselling author of *The Other Wes Moore* "This is no

ordinary memoir. It is an inspiring, important and utterly unforgettable saga. Every American should read it and any who do will be moved--moved to change and moved to act. John and Michael have opened up their innards, probing their friendship, their adventures, their disappointments and their demons so as to light a spark in all of us."mdash;Samantha Power, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *A Problem from Hell*ldquo;Unlikely Brothers is an unlikely book, two interweaving stories filled with loss, tenderness and hope. John Prendergast's and Michael Mattocks's journeys - together and apart - should resonate for all of us, a searching for our place in the world, a yearning for friendship and connections.rdquo;mdash;Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here* and *Never a City So Real*"A fascinating account of a long-standing friendship." mdash;Publishers Weeklyldquo;Despite their contrasting perspectives, Prendergast and Mattocks illustrate that when it comes to the human condition, attitudes trump platitudes and actions outweigh promises.rdquo;--Booklistnbsp;"A feel-good narrative that underscores the brutal effects of poverty at home...About the AuthorJOHN PRENDERGAST is a human rights activist and author. He is cofounder of the Enough Project (enoughproject.org), an initiative to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Working for the Clinton administration, he was directly involved in a number of peace processes in Africa. John helped create the Satellite Sentinel Project with George Clooney; coauthored two books with Don Cheadle; and worked on films with Ryan Gosling. He traveled to Africa with 60 Minutes for four different episodes. He has been a Big Brother since 1983.nbsp;MICHAEL MATTOCKS lived in homeless shelters as a child and began dealing drugs as a teenager. He is now a husband and father of five boys, working two jobs in order to support his family. He helps coach his sons's football teams.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Chapter 1 ldquo;He Ain't Heavy, Father, . . .rdquo; nbsp; Michael Mattocks Now, you got to remember I was little when all this started. I know now how fucked up my childhood was, but I didn't know it then. I just lived itmdash; me, my mom and Willie, my little brother James, and my big sister Sabrina. We were living in a big old run- down house in Washington, D.C., with my grandparents, aunts, and uncles piled in on top of us. We all slept in one big room. Back in them days we had enough to eat, but it wasn't like anybody was cooking family meals. We kids would get some cereal if we were hungry. To a little kid, living all together like this was fun. One of the earliest things I remember, though, was my mom and them crying. My aunt Francine's husband beat her to death with an iron, wrapped her body up, stuffed her in the wall where he lived, plastered it over, and painted the wall. I got a cousin who remembers that too. He was small, but he remembers. Aunt Francine was his mother. nbsp;nbsp; My mom has always been a real pretty lady. Not tall, but proud and upright like a queen. Her dadmdash; my grandfathermdash; was real hard on her. With us kids he was okay, but he drank, and he could be mean to my grandmother and to their kids. Not a one of my mother's brothers and sistersmdash; and there were thirteen of themmdash; turned out right. What saved my mom was that she had Willie, her husband, who worked construction and always brought his pay home to look after us. Willie was slim and dark- skinned, with very wide- set eyes and a big smile. Always wore a goofy little corduroy cap. On weekends he would take us kids out to Sandy Point Beach near Annapolis and teach us how to fish, and if we met up with anybody, he'd introduce us as his kids. Willie was a hugging manmdash; always wrapping us kids up in his arms. For a long time, I thought Willie was my dadmdash; even though he had a different last name. You don't think about that stuff when you're a kid. Everything changed when my grandfather passed. Grandma sold the house where we all lived together, and everybody went their own way. She could have held the family togethermdash; she was the grandmother. She had that power. But her thirteen children were all beefing with each other, so she sold the house, and we all just fell apart. By that time, my mom had had my little brother David and my sister Elsie too, so there were seven of us in our family: five kids, Willie, and my mom. We moved to an apartment in Landover, Maryland. But we didn't stay there long because one day Willie took me and my little brother James to go see his friend Mr. Morris, and as we were walking up the alley, Willie just fell out. His eyes rolled up and down he went. James and I must have been crying real bad, because Mr. Morris came running out and called the ambulance. I remember the doctors telling my mom that Willie had an aneurysm in his brain and to ldquo;expect some changes.rdquo; Some changes? Willie was gone in the VA hospital six months, and when he came out, he took one look at my mommdash; mother of his childrenmdash; and said, ldquo;I don't know you.rdquo; Next day, he took David with him when he went back to the hospital to pick up some medicine, and he forgot him there. David must have been about three years old. My mom was screaming, ldquo;Where is he? Where is my baby?rdquo; and Willie kept saying, ldquo;I left him here with you.rdquo; He didn't have any idea. It took my mom forty- nine hours to find little David; some homeless lady had kidnapped him from the hospital and taken him back to the shelter, at Second and D, where she was staying. Luckily, a sharp- eyed social worker there noticed that the woman suddenly had a child who obviously wasn't hers, and the social worker called the police. Not long after we got David back, Willie drifted off. He didn't know who we were, and he was going to look for his own people. He left my mom with five children. That must be when we became homeless; I was six. I don't remember how it all went down, but I know there was one shelter after another because they never let you stay in any one for more than a few nights. Sometimes we stayed in these slum- ass motels the city put us inmdash; dirty, cheesy places full of roaches. One time the city put us and about fifty other families in a school at Fourth and O. They pushed the desks aside and set up cots, and we all had to be out of there in the morning before the children showed up. Most of all I remember carrying our

stuff around the streets in Hefty bags, and not knowing in the morning where I'd be sleeping that night. But herersquo;s the thing: Nobody should feel sorry for us, the way we was back then. I know it sounds funny, but we were happymdash; at least us kids. We didnrsquo;t know it was bad. My mother cared a lot about us. She made sure we ate every day, even if it was just a little something. If she had a little money, shersquo;d get us a McDonaldrsquo;s even if we had to split a cheeseburger three ways. I remember us standing at a bus stop one time real hungry, and my mom gathered some change, and all she could get us was a couple of twenty- five-cent cupcakes so that wersquo;d have something in our stomachs. That she tried so hard meant a lot to us. Those hunger pains would never really go away, though. Often we would have canned meat. That shit smelled like dog food out of the can, but my mom somehow made it taste real good. Our bouncing from shelter to shelter went on for a couple of years. One time my mom took us to her sister, our Aunt Evelynrsquo;s house, and asked if could we spend the night, and Aunt Evelyn told my mom no. I donrsquo;t know why she did that, but like I said, the family kind of came apart after my grandfather passed. Thing is, we never slept on the street. Mom would find us a shelter for a few days, and then wersquo;d be out on the streets again, in the heat, hauling our stuff around in those black Hefty bags. My mom could have put us in foster care, but she didnrsquo;t. Around that time, Aunt Evelyn gave up her kids, all seven of them. I donrsquo;t know where she went, but she was smoking crack, and one day she just walked out on her kids, right out of the house they owned off Florida Avenue. Mom was there that day, visiting, and she just rounded up Aunt Evelynrsquo;s kids and brought them to the shelter and hid them in our room there. They was our cousins, our family, and we just all crammed in together and didnrsquo;t think twice about it. Mom saw what happened to Aunt Evelyn, and she kept us all together. So for a little while, she was raising all of us and five of Aunt Evelynrsquo;s kids right there in the shelter. The two eldest cut out once their mom left them, and later on, two of them stuck around and lived with us. Mom didnrsquo;t know much about raising children, but she knew enough not to let us go. I remember we were at a shelter place, and some people came to my mom and said they wanted to take us. Man, mom flipped out. ldquo;You ainrsquo;t taking my motherfucking kids!rdquo; Screaming and throwing shitmdash; she really went off. There wasnrsquo;t anything wrong with us as a family, really; we just didnrsquo;t have money, plain and simple. We also didnrsquo;t get a whole lot of hugging once Willie was gone. Mom was all about just getting us through the daymdash; ten- hut, pick up your things there, look after your little brother, find your other shoe. Just getting her own five kids up and fed and off to the next shelter was about all she could do. Pretty soon, it was time for me and James and Sabrina to go to school. Therersquo;d be anbsp;van come take us to Thompson Elementary, pick us up at whatever shelter and take us back there. No one knew we was from the shelter because we hid it real good. My sister Sabrina was seven, one year older than me; she was more like the big brother than a big sister. She was a little bitty thingmdash; pretty like my mommdash; but man, you didnrsquo;t want to fuck with Sabrina. A kid would tease us about our raggedy- ass no-name- brand shoes, and Sabrina would come down on him like a hurricane. Always ready to throw the fuck down, and it wouldnrsquo;t matter how big the other kid was. Always getting in trouble for fighting and wouldnrsquo;t give a fuck. To her, it didnrsquo;t matter going to the principalsquo;s office. She had her little brothers to defend. Like a mama bear with her cubs; that was Sabrina. To this day, Irsquo;ve never seen her lose a fight. James, he was one year younger than me, and he was Williersquo;s boy for sure because they had the same last name: Whitaker. James was small and skinny, and darker than me. We have Cherokee in our blood from way back, and you could really see it in James. We were tight, being the two big boys of the family. We did everything together. But he and Sabrina shared something that I never didmdash; that love of fighting. James could be going along just fine and then something would set him off. Even as a little kid I remember being shocked by it. Wersquo;d be out playing in the street with some kids and Irsquo;d think everything was fine, and suddenly James would be throwing his fists on some kid like to kill him. I cansquo;t be sure why James was like that, but part of it maybe was because he and Willie had a special bond, more than Sabrina or me. It hurt us all when Willie left, thatrsquo;s for sure, but it hurt James the most. He was in a lotta pain for a long time from that. And he was real angry at my mom over it, but I didnrsquo;t know why. He turned that anger on other people, and most times I wouldnrsquo;t even see it coming. Thatrsquo;s where I think his love of fighting came from. James, he never did get over Willie leaving. I wasnrsquo;t like that. I didnrsquo;t really like to fight. I wouldnrsquo;t get mad like that. It made me feel safe, though, having Sabrina on one side of me and James on the other. Even as little kids,...